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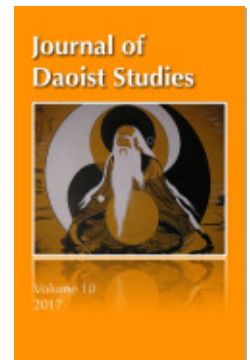
Daoist Seals: Part 1: Activation and Fashioning

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Daoist Seals

Part 1: Activation and Fashioning¹

SHIH-SHAN SUSAN HUANG

Abstract

The oldest Daoist seals appear in the Eastern Han dynasty, growing in importance and complexity throughout the middle ages. In particular, the so-called Yue Seal had an enduring reputation in Daoist healing and exorcism, its transmission, reproduction, and transformation ranging from the Han to the Tang and Song. The preferred materials for Daoist seal-making were first stone and metal, and later wood notably wood struck by lightning. Various ritual rules applied to carving, including selecting auspicious dates and properly venerating and placing the seal.

The Chinese joined other ancient civilizations in the Near East, Egypt, and Greece as the earliest to create seals and sealing practices, primarily for authentication and securing property.² Certain seals produced in these diverse traditions were also deemed amuletic, wielding additional healing and protective powers, and used in religious or shamanic contexts (Collon 1997). In some cultures, especially in China, the impression of a seal was also called “seal” and was respected as equally authentic. As Verity Platt convincingly notes, the seal, compared to other forms

¹ I would like to thank Paul Copp, Shu-wei Hsieh, Ian Boyden, Norifumi Sakai, and Richard Smith for their inspiring suggestions, and Jesse Richard Green and Livia Kohn for their editorial assistance. I am grateful for Andrew Taylor for his preparation for most illustrations.

² See Gibson and Biggs 1977; Collon 1988; 1997; Boardman 2001; Platt 2006; Zhou 2010; Sun 2002; 2004; 2010; Hu 2005. The earliest Chinese seals were from the Shang (1600-1000 BCE) (Tsien 1985, 137). See also Wagner in Collon 1997, 205.

produced by casting and moulding, "is the only form of reproduction which was not carried out by specialist craftsmen within workshops but was frequently enacted by anybody who owned" it (2006, 238-39). This "self-replicatory power" creates an automatic tension between the "original" and "copies" (2006, 234, 238), making seals a unique medium in the realm of visual and material culture.

Seals were cut in relief or in intaglio on hard-surface materials such as jade, ivory, or wood. In Chinese, both the noun and the verb of "seal" is called *yin* 印. The term can also mean print or printing, primarily woodblock printing, invented around the 7th to 8th centuries (Tsien 1985; Barrett 2001; 2008). The linguistic interchangeability of seal stamping and block printing sheds light on their close relationship in Chinese culture, prompting scholars to see their carving and impressing as the technical precursor of Chinese printing (Tsien 1985, 136).

Unlike the picture-based seals from the Near East and Mediterranean, the mainstream Chinese seals throughout history were heavily loaded with writings and scripts, only some early exemplars bearing pictorial images (Luo 1987; 2010, 52-55; Collon 1997, 219, Fig. 12/3; Tseng 1993, 100; Copp 2018). Before the boom of Chinese archaeology in recent decades, researchers relied primarily on catalogues transmitted in history. While the now-lost *Xuanhe yinpu* 宣和印譜 (Seal Manual of the Xuanhe Reign) under Emperor Huizong (Ebrey 2008, 2014) was arguably the earliest imperially-patronized catalogue, most extant manuals date from after the mid-16th century. Selected listings in Wang Qiu's 王俅 (ca. 12th c.) *Xiaotang jigulu* 嘯堂集古錄 (Antiquity Collection of the Whistling Hall; pref. 1176) and Zhao Yanwei's 趙研衛 *Yunlu manchao* 雲麓漫抄 (Free Copy of the Cloudy Foothill; pref. 1206) in the Southern Song form an exception.³

In addition, scholars also turned to collectors' seals, stamped on portable paintings and calligraphic scrolls, especially those collected at the imperial courts and by elite scholars. Their scholarship is known as the study of seals (*yinxue* 印學) or the connoisseurship of seal impres-

³ *Xiaotang jigulu*, xia zhi shang: 20a-25b; *Yunlu manchao*, 15:1a-13b. The next earliest extant seal manual is Gu Congde's *Jigu yinpu* 集古印譜 dated 1572; see *Zhongguo guyinpu jicheng*, *Jiguyinpu* 中國古印譜集成. 集古印譜 (Jinan: Shandong meishu chubanshe, 2011).

sions (*yinjian* 印鑑). It is essential to students of Chinese art (Wang 1966; Shanghai 1987; Wu 2010). In general, the overarching methodology governing the study of Chinese seals has been squarely visual: the main goal of the pursuit has been devoted to deciphering the inscriptions of seals, dating, and distinguishing the originals from the forgeries (Peng 2008, 2009, 2014).

Daoist seals have not formed the subject of any studies to date. They appear in abundant illustrations in the *Daozang* 道藏 (Daoist Canon; dat. 1445)⁴ and were also found variously in archaeological sites. Going beyond the approaches used in traditional connoisseurship or art history, stressing mainly the visual analysis of objects, I incorporate more recent contextual and interdisciplinary approaches, treating Daoist seals as material objects and mediators, enabling and enacting Daoist belief. I examine Daoist seals within multi-faceted Daoist practices, in which they were produced, viewed, and used. Thereby, I provide a Daoist response especially to the various thought-provoking publications by the Christian art historian David Morgan, who fervently encouraged researchers to treat “material religion” or “visual religion” as a newly-integrated area of inquiry, drawing established methods from both art history and religious studies (2000; 2004; 2010).

Seals join talismans, charts, writs and other miscellaneous forms of Daoist documents to shape the “true form” of Daoist visual culture, whose unique underpinning lies on the constant blending of writings and graphs (Huang 2012, 11-12). To borrow J. T. W. Mitchell’s picture theory, Daoist seals are noted for their “imagetext” quality that denotes “a composite, synthetic form” (Mitchell 1994, 83).

Compared to other forms of Daoist imagetexts, such as talismans,⁵ Daoist seals have received little attention even within the field of Daoist studies.⁶ However, Daoists have used seals along with talismans in exor-

⁴ Daoist texts from the *Daozang* are numbered according to Schipper and Verellen 2004 and follow the Sanjia ben edition in 36 volumes (Beijing Wenwu; Shanghai: Shanghai shudian; Tianjin: Gujin chubanshe, 1988).

⁵ See Li 1997; Despeux 2000; Verellen 2006; Ren 2006; Mollier 2003; 2008; Legeza 1975; Tseng 1993, 79-96; Bokenkamp in Pregadio 2007, 1:35-38.

⁶ Studies include Wang 2000, 2001; Li and Lu 2002; Li 2003a, 2003b; Liu 2007; Ren 2006, 246-73.

cism, healing, and other ritual performances. Their roles are sometimes interchangeable: The Daoist adept stamps a seal onto a talisman before putting it into operation. Alternatively, the Daoist healer inks the seal with mineral substances, stamps it on paper, and burns it to ashes, thus creating a liquefied medicine the patient would ingest.

From the perspective of Daoist hierarchy, seals have a higher status than talismans. As the Southern Song (ca. 1200) *Duren shangjing dafa* 度人上經大法 (Great Rites of the Book of Universal Salvation; DZ 219, 3:1021) so vividly puts it:⁷

If one only possesses the talisman and not the seal, it is like having soldiers without a general. If one only possesses the seal and not the talisman, it is like having a general without soldiers.⁸

The general-and-soldiers analogy further highlights the military overtone that often underlies Daoist exorcism and salvation rituals; their higher status may also explain why there are many fewer seals than talismans recorded in the Daoist Canon. Flipping through the collection, illustrations of seals are not the most eye-catching, mainly because they are tiny compared to often flamboyant talismans. Indeed, Platt raised the paradox of the seal, contrasting its "great significance" with its "tiny size" (2006, 237). Susan Stewart's oft-cited theory of the gigantic versus the miniature proves to be helpful in unpacking such a paradox (1984, 47-48; Platt 2006, 237). The seal, analogous to "the miniature object," does not lose its monumentality because of its physical size. Rather, its minute scale entails concentration, hence further empowering the esoteric and symbolic meanings carried within. It is the reduced physical appearance of a seal that brings to the fore the magnitude of its "ideological properties" (2006, 237).

⁷ On the text, see Skar 2000, 436; Lagerwey in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 1028-32; I Skar in Pregadio 2007, 1:678-79.

⁸ This is stated in the context of the Seals of the Divine Tiger (Messengers) (*Shenhu yinzhang* 神虎印章) used in salvation ritual. The same expression is in *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法, DZ 1221, 31:9.

The Oldest Seals

Daoists of the Eastern Han to the Wei-Jin periods inherited ancient Chinese seal culture and expanded their function from authentication and security to religious dimensions that included exorcism and healing (Bumbacher 2012). Abundant archaeological finds of ancient seals brought to light the early development of Daoist seals.⁹

The earliest Daoist seals date from the Han dynasty. Fashioned after official seals, they were mostly bronze, with legible characters cast in seal script (Liu 2007, 132). Selected seal inscriptions suggest that the Monarch of Heaven (Tiandi 天帝) and the Yellow God (Huangshen 黃神) were the most frequently evoked divinities. There are an important group of seals and clay impressions for sealing (*fengni* 封泥), whose inscriptions read “Messenger of the Monarch of Heaven” (Tiandi shizhe 天帝使者) (Fig. 1), a self-imposing title referring to the Daoists using the seals (Wang 2001, 437, no. 8).¹⁰

Most of these seals and clay impressions were probably used by Celestial Master Daoists in exorcism, as specimens of the Demon-Killing Seal by the Monarch of Heaven (*Tiandi shagui zhi yin* 天帝殺鬼之印) may indicate (Liu 2007, 138-40; Zhang and Bai 2006, 1:256; Wang 2001, 437, nos. 13-14). One such example (Figs. 2a-b) shows the seal with two carved surfaces. On the “front” side, six characters carved in seal script were evenly divided in two registers marked by a grid (Fig. 2a). On the “back” side (Fig. 2b), the seal bears a pictorial design of horses under a two-storied building, which may be purely decorative without any particularly religious connotation. The seal’s grid design, script style, and pictorial styles all compare to what was current in the seal visual culture at that time (Luo and Wang 1963, 56, 71; Luo ed., 1987, 9-13; Tseng 1993, 100; Copp 2018).

⁹ See Wang 2000, 10-23; 2001, 3-15; Zhang and Bai 2006, 1:245-56; Liu 2007, 131-74; Shao and Zhou 2001.

¹⁰ For more studies, see Wang 2000, 13-23; Zhang and Bai 2006, 1:249-53; Liu 2007, 136-38; Zhao 2007. The script style of this sealing clay compares to numerous other samples of sealing clays of this period discovered in archaeology. For more study of Qin and Han sealing clays, see the Qing compilation by Chen Jieqi 陳介祺, *Fengni kaolue* 封泥考略, 10 vols. (Haifeng Wushi, 1904); Sun 2002.



Fig. 1: Sealing clay of the Messenger of the Monarch of Heaven, excavated in Gaoyou, Jiangsu province. Eastern Han dynasty. Nan-jing Provincial Museum collection (Wang 2000, 21, no. 8)



a.



b.

Fig. 2: The double-sided Demon-Quelling Seal of the Monarch of Heaven, Zhejiang Provincial Museum collection— a. The front side of the seal; b. the back side of the seal. (Wang 2000, 21, nos. 14-1, 14-2)



a.



b.

Fig. 3: The double-sided Yue Seal—a. The front side; b. The back side (Wang 2000, 20, no. 21-1)

Perhaps the best documented and yet most enigmatic of all, are the numerous seals bearing four characters that read "Huangshen yuezhang" 黃神越章, interpreted as the spells of the Yue region [sanctioned] by Yellow Emperor,¹¹ hereafter called the Yue Seals. One specimen bears

¹¹ Wang 2000, 20-21; Wang 2001, 435-36, 440-41; Liu 2007, 146-57; Luo 1987, 86-87.

double-side carvings (Figs. 3a-b).¹² While one side contains four legible characters that read “Huangshen yuezhang,” whose script style compares to the mainstream Han official seals (Luo ed., 1987, 9-73), the other side is filled with twenty semi-graphic writs, each placed evenly within a square unit of the 5x4 grid (Fig. 3b). One can vaguely make out the four-unit vertical line near the right edge of the impression as the four characters that read “Demon [Killing] Seal” ([sha] gui zhi yin [殺鬼之印]), echoing the demon-quelling notion evoked in the other double-sided seal discussed earlier (Fig. 2a).

Pertinent to this is an infusion dispelling inscription (*jiezhu wen* 解注文), dated 133 CE and written in vermilion ink on the infusion dispelling earthenware jar (*jiezhu ping* 解注瓶) (Fig. 4), found in an Eastern Han tomb in Shaanxi.

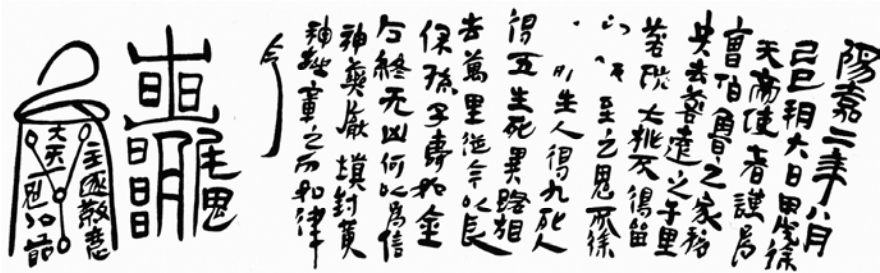


Fig. 4: Inscription and talismans on a jar, from the tomb of Cao Lubo, Zhujiaobao, Huxian, Shaanxi. Dated 133. Eastern Han dynasty (Wang 2000, 22, Fig. 11; Wang 2001, 444).

The inscription further situates the use of the Yue Seal in a funerary context, identifying the Messenger of the Monarch of Heaven as the seal user who expels ailments for the tomb occupant. The inscription documented a funeral ceremony at the grave entrance of the layman Cao Bolu

¹² Wang 2000, 13, 20. Wang Yucheng's reproductions of the seal in 2000 and 2001 were based on Shang Chengzuo 商承祚, *Qizhai guyin cun* 契齋古印存; see Wang 2000, 20, no. 21-1; Wang 2001, 436, no. 21.

¹³ Wang 2000, 18-20; Wang 2001, 443-44; Ren 2006, 158; Robson 2008, 136-37. For more studies of the ample infusion dispelling inscriptions on funeral urns or jars in Eastern Han tombs, see Wang 1991; Zhang and Bai 2006, 1:1-330; Liu 2007, 11-98; Seidel 1987; Sakade et al., 2007, 66-70.

曹伯魯 and performed by a Daoist who used the Seal of the Yue Spells to expel the deceased person's illness. The written text is followed by two talismans bearing graphs referring to suns, moon, stars, and demons.¹³

The Yue Seal

The Yue Seal appears first in Ge Hong's 葛洪 (284-363) *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (DZ 1185, 28:241-42; Ware 1966, 298-99; Wang 2001, 441-42). According to this, the seal is four *cun* wide, i.e., about ten centimeters, and bears 120 characters. While it is compelling to imagine how a seal surface that is 10x10 square centimeters can be filled with as many as 120 words, no archaeological finds to date confirms this description.¹⁴

Ge Hong notes that the Yue Seal had immense powers of exorcism and protection and was a "must-have" emblem of any seeker venturing into mountain wilderness. The seal could be put into operation in multiple ways: wearing or carrying it on the road and impressing it on the mud to make sealing clays to safeguard the environment, preventing attacks by tigers and wolves. A story Ge cites extends the Yue Seal's efficacy from exorcism and protection to healing. It recounts Daoist Dai's subjugation of demonic spirits previously residing in the Tortoise Pool and causing people to fall ill. The Daoist cured the sick by throwing hundreds of sealing clays into the pool, thus expelling all demonic tortoises (Ware 1966, 298-99; Lin 2008, 219).

As Zhang Xunliao and Bai Bin have pointed out (2006, 256), the Yue Seal also stirred disturbing reactions from medieval Buddhist monks. Numerous Buddhist treatises, including those compiled in the *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (T52.2102:49b) and *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (T52.2103:149c), see the Daoist uses of the Yue Seal in killing demons (*shagui* 殺鬼) as a

¹⁴ Compared to the ample archaeological samples of Daoist seals dated to the Han, there are fewer Daoist seals dated to the Jin period. An unusual Daoist seal of this period contains twelve characters 黃首朱官玉女蘭房教導之印 evoking celestial maidens to expel tigers and wolves, see Wang 2000, 25; Liu 2007, 144. The other Jin seal discovered in Dantu 丹徒, Jiangsu bear carved characters in six sides, each side containing four characters, see Wang 2000, 28. For an undated Daoist seal bearing thirty-six characters on a single side, see Feng and Wang 1996.

heterodox practice; they further trace this practice to the Celestial Master Daoism.¹⁵

The Tang work *Zhengyi fawen xiuzhen zhiyao* 正一法文修真旨要 (Essentials of the Practice of Perfection; DZ 1270, 32:578) elaborates the Daoist use of the seal in a therapeutic context (Strickmann 1993, 10-20; 2002, 124-32; Zhang and Bai, 1:256). The procedure involves visualizations (*cun* 存), spells (*zhou* 咒), and stamping of the seal (*xiayin* 下印), as well as five ritual objects: a bowl of water, a sword, a bell, a lithophone (*qing* 磬), and a seal. The highlight of the master's healing performance consists of seven steps:

1. The Daoist master spews water from the bowl, both into the environment and on to the patient, for purification (*penshui jiehui* 噴水解穢).

2. He goes through a series of visualizations, summoning the cosmic divinities including the true official (*zhenguan* 真官), the essence of the seven stars of the Dipper (*beidou qixing zhi jing* 北斗七星之精), the five planets, divinities of the four directions (vermillion bird, azure dragon, white tiger, and tortoise), the jade boy and maiden who put the seal into operation (*xingyin yutong yunü* 行印玉童玉女), the sun, the moon, and the body gods from his own organs.¹⁶ In the visualization, the true official performs the seal healing for the patient: he visualizes this bureaucratic god pacing the ritual choreography of the Steps of Yu (*yubu* 禹步), stamping the seal on the patient's heart, stomach, and finally on wherever the patient feels pain (Strickmann 2002, 128). The visualization ends with a vision of "the toxic vapors coming out of the patient and rushing away" (*xiangjian duqi bensan erchu* 想見毒氣奔散而出) (Strickmann 1993, 15).

3. He walks to the patient by performing the Steps of Yu.

4. He calls the myriad spirits' attention by striking the bell and the lithophone six times respectively.

¹⁵ Wang Yucheng links the Yue Seal to the Taiping Daoism 太平道 or Wudoumi dao 五斗米道, see Wang 2001, 440. Past scholarship has revealed the Buddhist use of talismanic seals; see Wang 2000; Strickmann 2002, 132-78; Copp 2011; Suchan and Sørensen 2013.

¹⁶ The text mentions three body gods in each organ. Strickmann failed to include the three body gods from the master's lungs; see Strickmann 2002, 128. For more study of body gods in Daoist visual culture, see Huang 2010; 2012, 25-85.

5. He recites the preparatory spells that evoke the all-encompassing power of the Divine Seal of the Monarch of Heaven (*Tiandi shenyin* 天帝神印) (32:578; Strickmann 2002, 128-29).

6. He stamps the seal on the patient.

7. With each stamp, he evokes the power of the Yue Seal by chanting spells with a repetitive formula: “Stamp (body part), from (body part) out” (yin [] cong [] chu 印[]從[]出) (Fig. 5a). The context makes it clear that the Daoist should stamp the seal on the various ailing body parts to draw out toxic vapors:

With the Yue Seal, I stamp on the patient’s heart—take the ailment out of his heart! 吾今以黃神越章之印，印心從心出

Stamp the abdomen, it comes out of the abdomen! 印腹從腹出

Stamp the liver, it comes out of the liver! 印肝從肝出

Stamp the lungs it comes out of the lungs! 印肺從肺出

Stamp the kidneys, it comes out of the kidneys! 印腎從腎出

Stamp the spleen, it comes out of the spleen! 印脾從脾出

Stamp the head, it comes out of the head! 印頭從頭出

Stamp the back, it comes out of the back! 印背從背出

Stamp the chest, it comes out of the chest! 印胸從胸出

Stamp the waist, it comes out of the waist! 印腰從腰出

Stamp the hands, it comes out of the hands! 印手從手出

Stamp the feet, it comes out of the feet! 印足從足出

Swiftly, swiftly, in accordance with the statutes and ordinances!¹⁷ 速出！速出！急急如律令

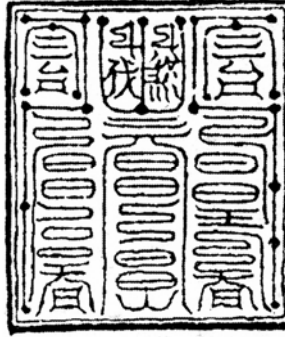
Michel Strickmann also published the untitled seal and analyzed it in a visually sensitive way (1993, 19; 2002, 131) (Fig. 5b, hereafter called Strickmann seal). Although it does not bear any label, it is likely that it is regarded as the Yue Seal or the Divine Seal of the Monarch of Heaven mentioned in spells. Alternatively, it may also refer to the actual seal used by the Daoist master in healing that evokes both seals mentioned in the spells.¹⁸

¹⁷ My translation is modified after Strickmann’s (Strickmann 2002, 129); I translate the verb “yin” as “stamp” and not as “seal.”

¹⁸ Wang Yucheng labels the seal as the Seal of the Monarch of Heaven, see Wang 2001, 473, no. 70 (he gave the wrong reference in Wang 2000, 60, no. 70). Wang

以黃神越章之印印心從心出印腹從腹出
 印肝從肝出印肺從肺出印腎從腎出印脾
 從脾出印頭從頭出印背從背出印臂從臂
 出印腰從腰出印手從手出印足從足出速
 出速出急急如律令印下又誦一遍然後舉

a.



b.

Fig. 5: Zhengyi fawen xiuzhen zhiyao, 32:578—a. selected citation of the text; b. an illustration of the seal.

Strikingly different from earlier samples, the Strickmann seal is filled with complicated graphs. Strickmann drew additional graphic analysis of the seal to highlight the scoop-shaped “doublet of the Northern Dipper and numerous renditions of the archaic logograph for the sun” (1993, 19; 2002, 131, Fig. 1a-b). Beyond that, some other legible words appear on the upper part of the seal design. They evoke the constellation known as the three terraces (Santai 三台),¹⁹ and exorcising actions such as “strike dead” (*sha* 煞) and “subjugate” (*fa* 伐). The overall graphic and script elements embedded in the seal match the Daoist master’s visualization of stars and his analogy of healing to demon-killing during his seal-healing performance. The seal calls to mind the wooden seal with engraved images of the constellations, the sun and moon used

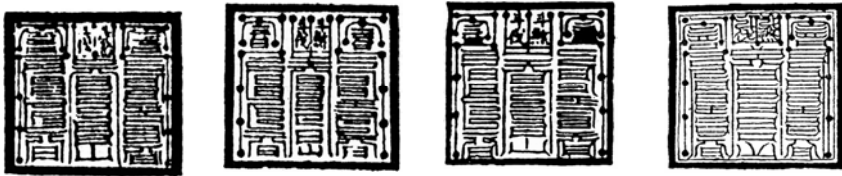
Yucheng reproduces six Qin-Han “compound” seals, whose identical title integrates the evocation of the Yue Seal with that of the Monarch of Heaven (Huangshen yuezhang Tiandishen zhiyin 黃神越章天帝神之印); see Wang 2001, 438.

¹⁹ The Three Terraces refer to the constellation in charge of nurturing lives; see, for example, *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* 赤松子中誡經, DZ 185, 3:445; *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* 靈寶無量度人上品妙經, DZ 1, 1:289.

by Daoists in healing, as recorded in the 6th-century *Suishu* 隋書 (History of the Sui Dynasty) (Strickmann 1993, 7).²⁰

Later Versions

Moving beyond these early specimens, there are various groups of Daoist seals illustrated in Southern Song-to-Yuan liturgical sources that show two different graphic templates closely comparable to the seal Strickmann reproduced (Figs. 6a-d, 7a-d).



a. b. c. d.
Fig. 6: The first group of the Yue Seals sharing an identical design—a. Seal of the Yue Spells. *Shangqing lingbao dafa*, DZ 1221, 30: 902; b. Seal of the Yue Spells. *Shangqing lingbao dafa*, DZ 1223, 31: 399; c. Seal of the Yue Spells. *Daofa huiyuan*, DZ 1220, 30: 168; d. Small Seal of the Yue Spells. *Sanhuang neiwen yimi*, DZ 856, 18: 583.

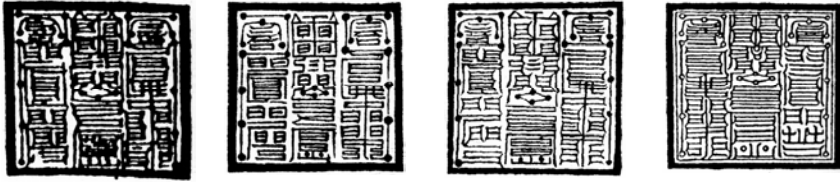
Like the Strickmann seal, these also have considerable healing powers (DZ 1221, 30:902, DZ 1223, 31:401; DZ 856, 18:583). While the graphic design underlining the first group (Fig. 6a-d) are almost identical with that of the Strickmann seal,²¹ the design of the second group indicates

²⁰ “[The Daoists] make wooden seals, on which they engrave the constellations, the sun, and the moon. Holding their breath, they grasp them in their hands and stamp them. Many sick persons are cured by that means” (Strickmann 1993, 7). For more on the use of talismans and seals in healing, as recorded in medical texts compiled by the Northern Song government and in other Daoist texts, see Lin 2013; Li in Li et al., 2000, 130-38, 163-67; Wang 2000, 37-38; Hinrichs et al. 2013, 108-11, 119-22.

²¹ They are numbered nos. 215-1, 216, 217-1, and 44 in Wang Yucheng’s illustrated index of the Daozang seals; see Wang 2000, 66-68, 72-73; 2001, 482, 491.

²² These are numbered nos. 196-1, 197, 198-1, and 45 in Wang Yucheng’s illustrated index of the Daozang seals; see Wang 2000, 59, 63, 66, 72; 2001, 482, 490.

slight modifications (Fig. 7a-d).²²



a. b. c. d.
Fig. 7: The second group of the Yue Seals sharing an identical design—

a. Seal of the Yellow Emperor. *Shangqing lingbao dafa*, DZ 1221 (juan 27), 30: 902;
b. Seal of the Yellow Emperor. *Shangqing lingbao dafa*, DZ 1223 (juan 10), 31: 399;
c. Seal of the Yellow Emperor. *Daofa huiyuan*, DZ 1220 (juan 183), 30: 168; d. Great Purity Seal of the Yellow Emperor. *Sanhuang neiwen yimi*, DZ 856, 18: 583.

Here the two graphic symbols of the Northern Dipper remain in their original symmetrical positions, while the *fa* and *sha* characters are replaced and enclosed by a constellation with a grid embedded with four “sun” characters. Also, there are more sun-and-star-inspired graphs.

In most cases, the two types of seals were illustrated as a pair that form a set of the Yue Seals. The first group is often referred to as the Yuezhang Seals (*Yuezhang yin* 越章印); the second group, as the Huangshen Seals (*Huangshen yin* 黃神印). Both versions of the *Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法 (Great Lingbao Method; DZ 1221, 30:902; DZ 1223, 31:399), one compiled by Wang Qizhen 王契真 and transmitted by Ning Quanzhen 寧全真 (1101-1181), the other edited by Jin Yunzhong 金允中 in the 13th century, tie the practice of the Yue seals to the ancient tradition. The measurement for each seal, for instance, is one *cun* and eight *fen* per side, using the Zhou measuring system (*Zhou chi* 周尺).²³ The use of the two paired seals in healing, furthermore, should also follow the ancient writings (*yi guwen yong er yin* 依古文用二印).

The seal templates preserved in the 14th-century *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (A Corpus of Daoist Ritual, DZ 1220, 30:168; Schipper and Yuan in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 1105-13; Loon 1980; Skar 2000, 430-31) are most illuminating (Figs. 6c, 7c). Their accompanying textual guidelines instruct that one should wear the Huangshen Seal to the left (Fig. 7c) and

²³ On the Zhou measuring system, see DZ 1221, 30:901; Wang 2001, 83, 494.

the Yuezhang Seal to the right (Fig. 6c). Furthermore, both seals have their back sides minutely incised with spells (*beiwén* 背文), containing more than 100 legible characters rendered in small regular script (*kaishu* 楷書) (Figs. 8a-b).



a.



b.

Fig. 8: Spells incised on the back of the set of the Yue Seals (DZ 1220, 30:168)—a. The incised spells on the back of the Huanshen Seal; b. The incised spells on the back of the Yuezhang Seal.

The spells incised on the Huangshen Seal contain 103 characters; those on the Yuezhang seal, about 110.²⁴ Similar, if not identical, illustrations appear in the *Shangqing lingbao dafa*.²⁵ Taken as a whole, these complicated seals with highly repetitive designs reflect the longevity and popularity of the Yue Seal through reproduction.

²⁴ The two seals were first reproduced in Wang 2000, 72-73 (nos. 198-2, 217-2). Similar, if not identical, illustrations of the incised texts on the back sides of the Yue Seals set are recorded in Wang Qizhen's *Shangqing lingbao dafa* (DZ 1221, 30:902). They are reproduced in Wang 2000, 73 (nos. 196-2, 215-2).

²⁵ DZ 30:902; Boltz 198, 41-46; Despeux 2000, 526-27; Lagerwey in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 1021-24. They are reproduced in Wang 2000, 73 (nos. 196-2, 215-2). A Southern Song text of the Pure and Clear Way Daoism illustrates a double-sided Divine Seal of Subjugating Demons (*Fumo shen yin* 伏魔神印) that also bears many characters; see *Lingbao jingming xinxiu jiulao shenyin fumo bifa* 靈寶淨明新修九老神印伏魔秘法 (preface by He Shouzheng 何守証 dated 1131), DZ 562, 10:548. As partially reproduced in Fig. 11 of this article, the seal's front side bears twenty-six characters in cloud-seal-script, and its back side bears thirty-five characters in small regular script.

The two spells begin with an evocation of different divinities: the Huangshen seal evokes the Monarch of Heaven and the Yellow Emperor, while the Yuezhang seal links to the authority of the Highest Lord Lao (Taishang laojun 太上老君). In contents they are quite similar, both summoning various stars, including the North Dipper, in charge of subjugating the evil spirits and healing illness. These seal spells are abbreviated versions of the so-called Yuezhang Spells (*Yuzhang zhou* 越章咒) and the Seal Spell (*Yinzhang zhou* 印章咒) recorded in the 14th-century *Sanhuang neiwen yimi* 三皇內文遺秘 (Transmitted Secrets of the Inner Writs of the Three Sovereigns; DZ 856, 18:583; Andersen in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 977). Here the two versions of the front designs—comparable to the first and second groups analyzed earlier—are also illustrated.

The Northern Song encyclopedia *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (Bookcase of the Clouds with Seven Labels; DZ 1221) recounts a vivid story first told by the Tang ritualist Du Guangting (850-933),²⁶ attesting to the Yue Seal's power of "spreading the *qi*, healing the ailment" (*buqi zhibing* 布氣治病) (DZ 1221, 30:902, DZ 1223, 31:401), and "subjugating all evil spirits" (*zhifu wanxie* 制伏萬邪) (DZ 856, 18:583). It tells of the Chengdu master Yuan Guizhen 袁歸真 deploying a newly-carved Yue Seal to cure a layman. By stamping the seal on his heart and back multiple times, he exorcised a demonic bat that had caused disease. The impression of the Yue Seal was visible on the bat's back as it flew out of the layman's mouth (Wang 2001, 442; Copp 2018).

The Physical Seal

Extant seal specimens show that early Daoist seals were typically made of hard materials such as stone, jade, bronze, and other metals. On the other hand, the majority of seals recorded in the Daoist Canon and Dunhuang manuscripts were made of wood. This preference for wood as a carving material is in line with the blossoming of woodblock printing in Tang-Song China, further connecting seal carving and woodblocks.

²⁶ See the story entitled "Miracle of the Huangshen Seal in curing Zhang Rang's sickness" (Zhang Rang Huangshenyin jiuji yan 張讓黃神印救疾驗), in *Yunji qiqian*, juan 118 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 4:2650.

Meticulous guidelines of Daoist seal materials specify the priority of specific woods. Peach (*taomu* 桃木) and jujube (*zaomu* 棗木) are preferable, although maple (*fengmu* 楓木), locust (*huaimu* 槐木), pear (*limu* 梨木), and sandalwood (*tanxiang* 檀香) are also recommended.²⁷

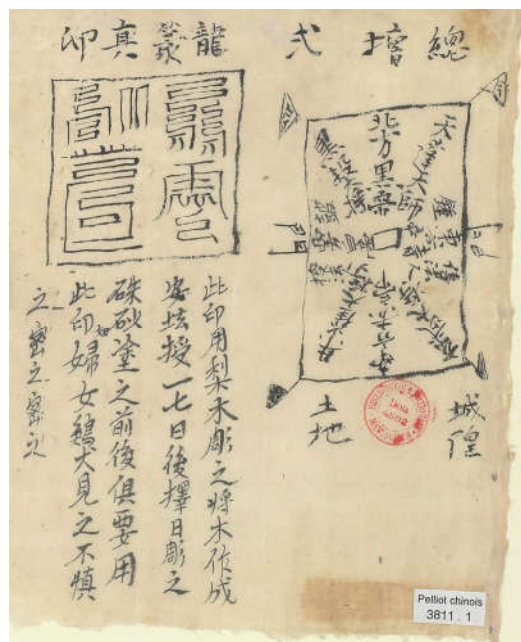


Fig. 9: Detail of the Dunhuang manuscript illustrating Daoist seals, talismans, and a ritual altar, P. 3811, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

For example, the True Seal in Dragon Seal Script (*Longzhuān zhēnyīn*) (Fig. 9), illustrated in a Daoist manuscript (P. 3811), specifies peach as the material for carving.²⁸ In preparation for carving, Daoists

²⁷ See *Daofa huiyuan*, DZ 1220, 29:151, 30:103, 108, 120, 317; *Huangdi taiyi bamen rushi bijue* 黃帝太一八門入式秘訣, DZ 587, 10:779; *Taishang yuanshi tianxun shuo Beidi fumo shenzhou miaojing* 太上原始天尊說北帝伏魔神咒妙經, DZ 1412, 34:401, 415; *Kuigang liusuo bifa* 魁罡六鎖秘法, DZ 582, 10:755; *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa* 靈寶無量度人上經大法, DZ 219, 3:809; *Bizang tongxuan bianhua liuyin dongwei dunjia zhenjing* 秘藏通玄變化六陰洞微遁甲真經, DZ 857, 18:596.

²⁸ Wang 2000, 38-41; Wang 2004, 153. See the Bibliothèque nationale de France, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8303207b/f1.item.r=Pelliot%203811> (retrieved 10/4/2016). Originally dated to the 8th to the 10th centuries, Wang Ka finds it no

would color certain woods, especially peach, with auspicious overtones and Daoist writings to increase their apotropaic power. As Li Yuanguo notes, the earliest Daoist talismans were “talismans on peach wood” (*taofu* 桃符) (Li et al. 2000, 162-63; Li 2003a, 342).²⁹ Wang Yucheng also called attention to the peach tree described in the *Shenzhou jing* 神咒經 (Scripture of Divine Spells; DZ 335, 6:2; Wang 2000, 88).

Growing in the celestial Jade Capital Mountain (Yujingshan 玉京山), the peach tree is charged with magical powers for expelling demons. Similarly, the *Daofa huiyuan* ranks peach wood as the best for seal carving, although certain kinds are better than others. For example, the wood from a tree facing the east is superior, perhaps because it is associated with the yang energy growing in the east and its exposure to the rising sun.³⁰ Peach wood found in graveyards possesses the most supernatural powers (*Daofa huiyuan* 29:151; Wang 2000, 87).

While some have auspicious associations, most recommended woods tend to be dense with smooth grain to facilitate carving. This matches the woods commonly chosen for printing blocks in the Song and Yuan. According to late Tseun-hsuei Tsien (1985, 196), fruit trees such as pear, jujube, and catalpa, are not only suitable for printing blocks but also abundantly available. Their smooth texture and medium hardness make them ideal carving materials. While pear has an even and smooth texture, “ideal for carving in any direction,” jujube is harder and bears an even grain with fine pores (1985, 196). Among surviving fragments of Song woodblocks, two are cut from jujube (Shi 1981, 71).

earlier than the Guiyijun 歸義軍 occupation of Dunhuang, i.e., mid-9th to early 11th centuries (2004, 153-54; Yu 2006, 95).

²⁹ For various medicinal values associated with the peach blossoms, peaches, peach tree roots, peach tree leaves, peach pits, peach skin, and so on, see Li Yuanguo in Li et al., 2000, 163.

³⁰ The east-facing wood calls to mind the “east-facing peach tree branch” (*tao dong zhi* 桃東枝) recorded in a Mawangdui document. Yu Xin connected the term to “sunny peach branch” (*yang taozhi* 陽桃枝), another term mentioned earlier in the same document; see Yu 2006, 332. It is likely that later Daoism also adopted this ancient concept and regarded the east-facing peach tree branch as more efficacious in expelling evil spirits. I am grateful for Yu Xin’s feedback.

Daoists believed that natural phenomena transmits cosmic energy and supernatural power to wood struck by lightning, establishing a uniquely Daoist criterion for the materiality of seals: "divine wood" (*shenmu* 神木), "wood struck / shaken / petrified / broken by thunder" (*leipi / chen / jing / po mu* 雷劈[霹]/震/驚/破木).³¹ Jujube lightning-struck wood appears most frequently. The paired Yue Seals recorded in the *Sanhuang neiwen yimi*, for example, have instructions that highlight the core of jujube struck by lightning (*leizhen zaomu xin* 雷震棗木心) as preferred material (18:582). One exception occurs in the *Daofa huiyuan* (30:317). Here the material for the Seal of the Highest of the Three Heavens (*Santian taishang yin* 三天太上印) should not be carved in jujube or catalpa struck by lightning, because it may "contain killing *qi*." The association of seals with the power of thunder, moreover, may connect to the growing Daoist Thunder Rites (*leifa* 雷法), performed widely in various sects in the Song and Yuan for rain-making, exorcism, and healing.³²

Parallel to the wood associated with thunder power is the "wood petrified by a dragon" (*longjingmu* 龍驚木),³³ an enigmatic category likely inspired by the lightning-struck wood. One case recorded in *Lingbao liuding bifa* 靈寶六丁秘法 (Secret Lingbao Method Concerning the Spirits of the Six Ding Days; DZ 581, 10:751) is the Seal of the Mysterious Maiden of the Nine Heavens (*Jiutian xuannu yin* 九天玄女印). To test its authenticity, one should leave it in water and see if it floats and moves by itself.

³¹ *Guiguzi tiansui lingwen* 鬼谷子天髓靈文 (DZ 867, 18:679-82); *Xuanpushan lingqin bilu* 玄圃山靈金秘錄 (DZ 580, 10:747), *Huangdi taiyi bamen rushi bijue* 黃帝太一八門入式秘訣 (DZ 587, 10:779), *Taishang yuanshi tianxun shuo Beidi fumo shenzhou miaojing* 太上原始天尊說北帝伏魔神咒妙經 (DZ 1412, 34:415), *Taishang dengzhen sanjiao lingying jing* 太上登真三矯靈應經 (DZ 286, 5:4), *Gaoshang shenxiao yuqing zhenwang zishu dafa* 高上神霄玉清真王紫書大法 (DZ 1219, 28:617), *Daofa huiyuan* 道法會元 (DZ 1220, 30:103), *Shangqing liujia qidao bifa* 上清六甲祈禱秘法 (DZ 584, 10:762). See also Wang 2000, 76-81, 82, 85.

³² See Matsumoto 2001, 205-31; Li 2003a, 2007; Reiter 2007; Skar 1996.

³³ *Lingbao lauding mifa*, DZ 581, 10:751; *Taishang chiwen dongshen san lu* 太上赤文洞神三錄 DZ 589, 10:797. See also Wang 2000, 76, 79.

Other Dimensions

Moving beyond the Daoist arena, comparative information on seal making also comes from Buddhist talismanic seals, illustrated in selected 8th-to-10th-century Dunhuang manuscripts and other canonical sources, such as the *Longshu wuming lun* 龍樹五明論 (Nāgārjuna's Seal Collection; T21n1420).³⁴ Both Xiao Dengfu (1993, 189) and Michel Strickmann (2002, 152-53) have pointed out to the medieval (7th c.?) Buddhist text *Foshuo Changquli dunü tuoluoni zhou jing* 佛說常瞿利毒女陀羅尼咒經 (The Book of the Spells and Dhāraṇī of the Jāngulī Woman; T21n1265; McBride 2011, 212) that illustrates a talismanic seal (Fig. 10a) "made of the wood from a jujube tree struck by lightning" (T21n1265:295a). Since this criterion is not seen elsewhere in Buddhist sources, it may well be Daoist-inspired.

According to Paul Copp, Buddhists uniquely used "the wood of the root of the Bodhi Tree" (*puti genmu* 菩提根木) (Copp 2011, 211)—where the Buddha attained enlightenment—to carve their seals. It appears in at least two manuscripts, P. 2153 (Fig. 10b) and P. 3874.³⁵ More generally, Buddhist sources show a slight preference for white sandalwood (*bai tangxiangmu* 白檀香木), although peach and jujube were also popular (Strickmann 2002, 173). The Buddhist seal evoking the healing power of the Tantric deity Vajrākumara (Jingang tongzi 金剛童子) and illustrated on S. 2498 presents an example (Fig. 10c).³⁶

The text below the seal illustration specifies that it is made of white sandalwood, measuring one *cun* and three *fen* on each side, and is suitable for stamping on a patient—a therapeutic use of seals comparable to that of the Yue Seals used in Daoism.

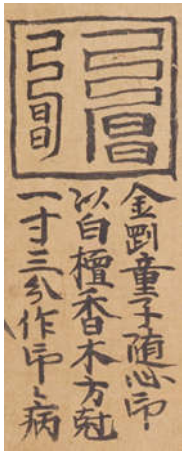
³⁴ Osabe 1982, 234-47; Strickmann 1993, 55-64; 2002, 170-78; Xiao 1993, 192-94; Copp 2011; Robson 2008. For the most recent study of seals found in Stein 2498, Pelliot 2153, 2602, 3835, 3874, see Copp 2011. For more on Buddhist seals, see Wang 2000, 41-53; Wang 2001, 459-70; Strickmann 1993; Xiao 1993, 187-94; Gao 1999, 451-55; Suchan and Sørensen 2013. Dating remains a thorny question for the study of these Dunhuang manuscripts. In a personal correspondence, Paul Copp tentatively dated the Buddhist Dunhuang manuscripts to the 9th-10th centuries. I am also grateful to Hsieh Shu-wei for his input on *Longshu wuming lun*.

³⁵ I would like to thank Paul Copp for offering this information.

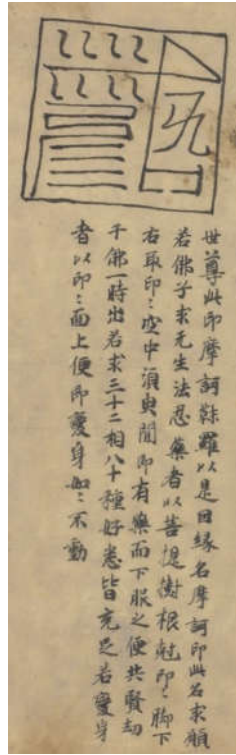
³⁶ Cf. a similar rendition of the same seal in the other manuscript (P. 2153).



a.



c.



b.

Fig. 10: Buddhist talismanic seals—a. Seal made of wood from a jujube tree previously struck by lightning, *Foshuo Changquli dunü tuoluoni zhou jing*, T21n1265:295a; b. Detail of P. 2153, Bibliothèque nationale de France; c. Detail of S. 2498, British Library.

Beyond materiality, size also matters in seal making. Most square seals recorded in the Daoist Canon range from one to five *cun*, with 2.4 being most frequent. The Southern Song *Jiulao shenyin fomo bifa* 神印伏魔秘法 (Secrete Rites for the Quelling of Demons by Divine Selas; DZ 562, 10:548; Schipper in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 1120-21), with a preface by He Shouzheng 何守証, dated 1131, further associates specific measurements of the length, width, and height of a two-sided Divine Seal for Quelling Demons (*fumo shenyin* 伏魔神印) with cosmic orders (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11: *Jiulao shenyin fomo bifa* 10:548. Southern Song.³⁷

Made of gold, silver, jade, or lightning-struck wood, it measures 2.4 *cun* in width, matching to the *qi* of the twenty-four solar periods or nodes. On the other hand, the seal's length of 2.8 *cun* corresponds to the twenty-eight lunar stations, while its height of 1.2 *cun* corresponds to the twelve cosmic nodes or months. In addition, the texts advise the artisan (*gongji-ang* 工匠) to face east while making the seal, echoing preferences for east-facing wood.

Other than wood, especially when used in healing, seals were also stamped on paper, then on occasion burnt to ashes, mixed with water and other herbal ingredients, and ingested by the patient. Thereby, the stamp-pad materials became part of liquefied "medicine." Alternatively, seals not meant for making an impression were sometimes coated with stamp-pad materials in conjunction with Daoist exorcism and other esoteric techniques.

The most popular dye in Daoist seal imprints is cinnabar (*zhusha* 朱砂),³⁸ a standard pigment used in traditional Chinese stamp pads³⁹ and in

³⁷ Note that one side of the double-sided seal bears thirty-five words in small regular script comparable to the back-sided designs of the Yue Seals illustrated in Fig. 8a-b of this article.

Daoism associated closely with immortality. According to Joseph Needham, cinnabar contains mercuric sulphide (1974, 177, 639), whose transformative connection to silver and gold have long been valued in Daoist alchemy.⁴⁰ To serve as the substance of a Daoist stamp pad, cinnabar was sometimes mixed with milk (*Daofa huiyuan* 10:317; Wang 2000, 77)—a supplement for glue, or bezoar (*niu Huang* 牛黃) (*Lingyin jing* 靈印經, DZ 859, 18:613; Lagerwey in Schipper and Verellen 2004, 977-78). The latter is a mass retrieved from a cow’s gastrointestinal system, highly regarded in Chinese medicine because of its anti-toxic quality.

Ritual Formulas

Seal making further involves a series of rules and rites. The basic procedure consists of two major parts, a seal-making formula (*zaoyin shi* 造印式 / *zhizao xingyin shi* 製造行印式) and a method of consecration (*jiyin shi* 祭印式 / *jiyin fa* 祭印法 / *shouchi yinzhang fa* 受持印章法).⁴¹ Key points include selected auspicious dates for seal carving and the logistics detailing how the altar and offerings should be set up to activate the seal.⁴²

Specific dates, such as the 5th day of the 5th month and the days of the Three Primes (*Sanyuan* 三元), devoted to self-confession and ances-

³⁸ See, for example, *Xuanpushan lingqin bilu*, DZ 580, 10:747; *Gaoshang shenxiao yuqing zhenwang zishu dafa*, DZ 1219, 28:617.

³⁹ Compilers of seal catalogues noted the variant qualities of cinnabar that were made into stamp pads; see *Zhongguo gu yinpu jicheng*, *Jigu yinpu*, 400-401.

⁴⁰ The oft-cited Hejia Village 何家村 hoard in Xi’an 西安 dated to the Tang dynasty contains cinnabar remains stored in a silver box—a material manifestation of its medicinal value in medieval China; see Huang 2014, 129, 164-65; 2012, 178.

⁴¹ For samples of the seal-making formula, see *Gaoshang shenxiao yuqing zhenwang zishu dafa*, DZ 1219, 28:616; *Daofa huiyuan*, DZ 1220, 29:829. For samples of the formula of offerings to the seal, see *Bicang tongxuan bianhua liuyin dongwei dunjia zhen jing* 秘藏通玄變化六陰洞微遁甲真經, DZ 857, 18:597-98; *Shangqing lingbao dafa*, DZ 1221, 30:904-905, 31:9; *Lingbao wuliang duren shangjing dafa*, DZ 219, 3:1021-22; *Lingbao jingming xinxiu jiulao shenyin fomo bifa*, DZ 562, 10:548; *Daofa huiyuan*, DZ 1220, 29:138. For more, see Wang 2000, 87-90; Ren 2006, 259-62.

⁴² For the Daoist rituals in which Daoist masters or Daoist gods put seals in operation, see Wang 2000, 75-87; Ren 2006, 252-58.

tral worship, are particularly auspicious.⁴³ Sometimes, additional rites honor the carving material. A case in point appears in the Dunhuang manuscript (P. 3811) illustrating the True Seal in Dragon Script (Fig. 9). It shows a diagram of the altar entitled the “Method of the Head Altar” (*zongtan shi* 總壇式) (Wang 2000, 39; 2001, 456; Wang K. 2004, 152-53; Yu 2006, 95-96). Read together with the seal guideline, it shows an outline of the space layout, where the selected seal’s material—in this case pear wood—should be venerated. Only after honoring the wood for 17 days can one pick an auspicious date to carve the seal (Wang 2000, 39).

As marked on the diagram, the square altar is located along a north-south axis, with two doors open on the east and west sides. The altar is decorated with flags at four corners. The rest of the diagram is filled with names of divinities, summoned to the altar and in charge of different directions. The north is presided over by the Black Emperor of the North (Beifang heidi 北方黑帝), flanked by the Great Master of Tianpeng (Tianpeng dashi 天蓬大師) and Great General of Black Killer (Hesha dajiang 黑殺大將). To the south, there are the Red Emperor of the South (Nanfang chi di 南方赤帝), accompanied by the Great General of the Dark Martial (Xuanwu dajiang 玄武大將) and the Great General of the Vermilion Bird (Zhuque dajiang 朱雀大將). The east side of the altar, where a bell is present, is presided over by the Green Emperor of the East (Qingdi 東方青帝), and is the place for the master transmitting the seal (*chuanfa ren* 傳法人). The west side of the altar, where a drum is present, is presided over by the White Emperor (Baidi 白帝), and is the place for the person who receives the seal (*shuofa ren* 授法人).

The seal activation ritual usually takes place in a purified chamber (*jingshi* 淨室), after which the seal is placed on the altar with offerings. A repetitive phrase in various versions of the ritual formula stresses the secrecy of such a ritual, forbidding women and animals to be around.

One elaborate formula concerning the activation of the Seal of the Celestial Maid (*Tiannü yin* 天女印, hereafter the Maid Seal)(Fig. 12) is em-

⁴³ E.g., *Sanhuang neiwen yimi* 18:582.

bedded with material and visual specifics.⁴⁴ The Maid Seal, one *cun* on each side, should be carved of the core of a jujube tree struck by lightning on either the days of the Three Primes or Double Five.

此印用雷劈棗木心方員一尺於三元日
或五月五日淨室焚香雕刻念溪女呪
五徧呼溪女名天女名祝罷於日午前刊
畢放在香案上神女前供養畢用栢木作
匣盛之用羅錦袋之放在匣中當日神女
前祭獻如要用取出用之此印神通不可
思議能令萬事成就



天女印
印即
也六甲

Fig. 12: Ritual formula of the Seal of the Celestial Maiden, *Shangqing liujia qidao bifa*, DZ 584, 10:762.

On the chosen date, the seal carver—either the Daoist master himself or an artisan—should chant spells and the names of the celestial maidens (*tiannü* 天女) and ladies from the stream (*xinü* 溪女), while carving the seal in a purified chamber accompanied by burning incense. After carving is complete before noon, the seal should be placed on the altar dedicated to the divine maidens as a token of offering. After this, it should be kept in a brocade bag and stored inside a box (*xia* 匣) made of

⁴⁴ *Shangqing liujia qidao bifa* 上清六甲祈禱秘法, DZ 584, 10:762; probably Tang. See Kalinowski in Schipper and Verellen 2:1241; Wang 2000, 40-41; 2001, 457; Mugitani in Pregadio 2007, 695-97.

cypress and put back on the altar.⁴⁵ The Daoist can then take the seal out whenever he needs to use it. The formula ends by praising the seal's efficacious power, noting its incredible magic and assistance in all tasks.

From a visual angle, the seal illustrated shows lined dots of the constellations and switchback layers of undulations. The overarching graphic idioms compare—albeit remotely—with the Yue Seal Strickmann first reproduced from the Tang Daoist text (Fig. 5b); they also call to mind the Seal of the Six Jia (*Liujia yin* 六甲印) (P. 3810; Wang 2000, 40; Wang K. 2004, 152-53) and the Daoist-inspired Buddhist seal for healing (P. 3874; Copp 2011, 220-24) illustrated in two Dunhuang manuscripts respectively (Figs. 13-14)—possibly dated to the 9th or 10th century.⁴⁶

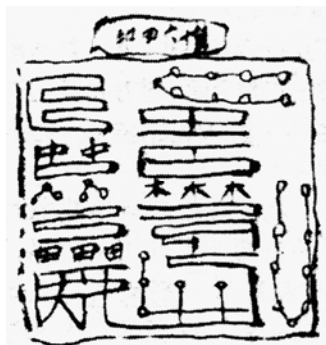


Fig. 13: Illustration of the Liujia Seal, Dunhuang manuscript fragment, P. 3810, Tang dynasty (?), Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Fig. 14: Detail of the fourth Buddhist seal sample illustrated in the Dunhuang manuscript, P. 3874, (9th or 10th c.), Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Conclusion

This study of Daoist seals has brought to light the multi-faceted significance embodied by miniature Daoist seals. Ancient seals from archaeo-

⁴⁵ Boxes, caskets, containers, bags play a symbolic role in concealing, securing the secrecy of Daoist treasures. For more study, see Tsai 2006.

⁴⁶ The design of the *Liujia* Seal in the Dunhuang manuscript is almost identical with two extant seals, one even used by the contemporary Daoist master in Taiwan; see Wang 2000, 41 (Figs. 17-1, 17-2); 2001, 458. The Buddhist seal in discussion is one of a series of twelve Buddhist seals illustrated in P. 3874, see Wang 2000, 48-49; 2001, 466; Copp 2011.

logical discoveries connect to an exorcistic and shamanic context at the dawn of Daoism. Some divine spirits evoked back then, such as the Monarch of Heaven and the Yellow Emperor, remained crucial supernatural powers summoned by Daoist seal users in medieval and later times.

Of all the seals transmitted, the Yue Seals enjoyed the longest legacy because their power extended from demon-expelling to healing. By the Tang-Song, stamping a talismanic Yue Seal on a patient was an efficacious act of healing. The intricate designs of the seals, retrieved from the Southern Song-Yuan Daoist texts, are the best exemplifications of Daoist miniature imagetexts, as one template of the double-sided Yue Seal bears more than one hundred characters in small regular script.

The power of a seal derives not only from the intricate imagetext engraved on its surface, but also from the physical material it is carved on. The wood from a tree struck by lightning marks the most uniquely Daoist criterion of materiality, quite possibly connected to the potent veneration of thunder troops, divinities in charge of thunder, lightning, wind, and rain. It may also be a straightforward response to the Thunder Rites thriving in Song-Yuan China.

While the Daoist seals under discussion are meant for use by Daoists to serve various purposes, newly-made seals are first and foremost the objects of veneration. As documented in both Dunhuang manuscripts and the Daoist Canon, rituals designed to activate the power of freshly-made seals take place under auspicious timing and subscribe to the principles of purity and secrecy.

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